



# **MOUNT MERRION FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**[BELFAST NORTHERN IRELAND].**



## **Pulpit Ministry of Mount Merrion Free Presbyterian Church**

Lord's Day Evening 6th April 2008.

*"A Faithful, Necessary and Effective High Priest"*

Scripture Reading Numbers Ch 16:41-50

By. Rev. Paul Thompson.

The children of Israel since their departure from the land of Egypt displayed a perpetual tendency to murmur at the Lord's leading throughout their wilderness journey. Very often the people's inclination to question God's providential leading & wisdom resulted in the integrity and proficiency of God's servant Moses, being brought into question by the people. You perhaps will recall how this spirit of discontentment amongst the Israelites at one point, reached such a height, in that consequently the Lord caused the entire congregation of Israel to wander in the wilderness for forty years, this journey should only have taken approximately eleven days. It may be thought that the severe chastening of the Lord would have cured this rebellious attitude amongst the congregation of Israel, yet as the record shows Israel continued to demonstrate a contemptuous and oft-times mutinous spirit, towards Moses.

Numbers Ch16 records probably the most daring and notorious rebellions ever to take place within the camp of Israel. A rebellion, which begins in v1 with three men Korah, Dathan and Abiram. In the hearts of these rebels there was a lurking desire for pre-eminence. The objective of Korah, Dathan & Abiram etc was to dispute and contend the position of Aaron as the High Priest. By their actions, Korah and his followers displayed not only a resentful attitude towards Moses and Aaron, but also a dissatisfaction with the will of God, for God had ordained Aaron to the Priesthood. The result of Korah's actions provoked the Lord and in a swift moment (v31-32), the ground upon which they stood clave asunder and swallowed them up.

By witnessing such a demonstration of divine displeasure and wrath, you would think that as a nation Israel's tendency to murmur and complain would be brought to an end, fearing the results of yet another rebellion. Yet we find the direct opposite. In (v41) we read of a new rebellion, "*but on the morrow...*" the congregation as a unified whole rise up and charge Moses and Aaron with the deaths of these men, "*Ye have killed the people of the Lord*" There are two things that arise out of that statement (1) *Korah was not a man of God*, he was a usurper seeking to establish another way of approach to God, other than that which God himself had ordained. (2) *Moses and Aaron had nothing to do with Korah's destruction* – it was the Lord who dealt with Korah and the rebels. Instead of appropriating to their hearts the lessons taught by Korah's actions, and fearing the results of another rebellion, it is obvious that the events of the previous day had been lost sight of, and the reasons for the sudden act of divine displeasure had been forgotten. In v41-50 the people are replicating the very same sin that Korah had been guilty of, rebellion against God. It's therefore not surprising to read on and discover that God who was so provoked by the sin of Korah and his accomplices is once again provoked to pour out His wrath against those who rebel against His cause and will. God tells Moses that He is going to consume the entire congregation. In (v46) the Lord sends a deadly plague among the people, one by one the people begin to fall down dead. On seeing that the plague had begun and many of the congregation beginning to fall, Moses immediately responds by commanding Aaron to run with a censer filled with fire from off the altar, and to go between the oncoming plague and the people. In (v48) we read that '*Aaron ran and stood between the dead and the living.*' It is owing to the actions of the Aaron the High Priest that the plague is stayed and the congregation are spared but not before thousands of them are slain.

In (v48) we have a clear Gospel presentation of the work of Christ, in the salvation of rebellious sinners.

### **1) A Faithful High Priest.**

When the plague started, Aaron was commanded by Moses to run with a censer, & stand in the midst of the people. Keep in mind Aaron had been abused and mistreated by the congregation, a few moments before they were going to take his life. But now the plague has begun, the people by the thousand begin to fall. Aaron could have stood back and let the plague overtake the people, but he didn't. As the High Priest of the people he was faithful in his role and office. In obedience to the command of Moses with swiftness he ran to where the plague was. We are told he '*Stood between the dead and living.*' What was Aaron doing, when he ran with his censer and stood between those whom the plague had already slain and those who were yet alive? He was exposing himself to the wrath of God. A mediator is one who interposes/intervenes between opposing parties, with the object of bringing about peace. In the one part of the camp that's where the wrath was. But the wrath was swiftly and steadily making its way through the camp towards those who were yet living, and was about to overtake them. But by assuming the position between those who were dead and those who were alive, Aaron exposed Himself to the full ferocity and rage of the wrath of God. Some commentators suggest that by the

*"Mercy's clock does not strike at the sinner's beck."*

*...Thomas Watson...*

words ‘*Aaron stood*’ is to mean that Aaron stood before the face of God. Upon the face that the marks of anger are first seen.

What gospel truth there is contained within that thought. For in Aaron you have a representation of Jesus Christ who is the merciful and faithful high priest, the one who stands between the sinner and the wrath of God. *2Tim Ch2:5* tells us that He is the only mediator between God & men, who stands between the wrath of God & the sinner? Wasn’t it Christ who bore the weight of God’s wrath on Calvary, suspended between heaven and earth on a cross? Even though He was maltreated at the hands of men, at the request of His Father, He willingly exposed Himself to the Father’s fiery indignation that should have fallen on sinners. In the same way that Aaron EXPOSED himself to the wrath of God, so also did Christ.

There on Calvary the full unmitigated fury of God converged on Christ, not for His own sins but for those whom he represented. Aaron as he stood before the face of God, he stood as representative for all those who were behind him, his mediation was on their behalf, it was for their sins. Remember so it was with Christ; as he suffered the wrath of God it was on behalf of all those given to him from all eternity, he bore other men’s sin. Aaron was faithful in regards to those whom he represented. Also Aaron stood until the wrath of God was satisfied. He stood there in his position until all the wrath was prevented from going any further, Jesus Christ is “*a Faithful and merciful high priest*” [Heb Ch2:17]. Even though Aaron did not deserve the wrath, he bore it for those who did deserve it! Yet He remained faithful unto death!

## **2) A Necessary High Priest.**

There was an urgent need for a mediator. God’s wrath was being poured out against the people by this plague. This pandemic was destroying all in its path, the people by the thousand were falling before it, and therefore something must be done. Moses first saw the plague break forth, why did he not do something? Why did he call for Aaron? From the narrative we know that Aaron stood between the people and the plague. What was it that made this situation so desperate that it necessitated Aaron the High Priest alone to stand between the dead & the living? First of all there are some questions that must be asked before we can establish the necessity of a mediator.

A - Upon what basis/foundation did the wrath of God come forth in such an overwhelming measure against these people? B - What was it that caused the Lord to bring about such devastation? C - Why was God so moved to destroy the entire nation? Those questions must be answered!

The answer I believe is seen in an understanding of what had taken place prior to these events in Numbers Ch16. Before Numbers Ch16 there was Sinai, where the people had received the Divine law in tabulated form. They were warned of the penalty for transgressing that law. Yet here in Ch16 we observe the people transgressing that law, and thereby bringing down upon them the penalty of the broken law. *The sin of murder arises in their hearts, the sin of covetousness, and the sin of murmuring.* Remember sin is the transgression of the Law of God.

Sin always brings down the judgment of God. God’s wrath is always manifested towards sin. God poured out His wrath because His law was transgressed/violated. Read Rom Ch1:18 Sinners need to be warned of that, for when we come to deal with the matter of your Salvation, we must warn you of God’s wrath, but that necessitates that we deal with God’s law. For it is upon the basis of a the broken law that the wrath of God is effused upon the sinner.

It’s here that there’s a lot of confusion, as to what God’s law is. All that proceeds forth from God is unconditionally flawless and morally perfect! For in much of preaching today sinners are not presented with the law of God, that standard to which God requires perfection. What is the law? The law not only states what God commands, but also reveals what & who God is. It is a revelation of the holy character of God. (Infinite holiness necessitates infinite abhorrence). The law is holy, why? Because God is holy. Many will readily confess that they have broken God’s law, but the full implications of what that means has never gripped your soul! Sinner that means that since you have offended or transgressed the law, you have ultimately offended the holy character of God. That’s how serious sin is. God’s wrath is a righteous wrath for his holiness demands it.

Therefore His wrath in against you, as a continual offender of God’s law, you are a living provocation to the character of God, your sin comes before His face. In the same way that the wrath of God was approaching

*“God is as faithful in His menaces as in His promises.”*

*...John Trapp...*

every offending Israelite, so also is the wrath of God approaching your soul. And if you are to be saved from the impending judgment of God, you need a mediator, in the same way that these people desperately needed one to stand between you and God's wrath. God's law will be satisfied in only one of two ways either by Christ, or by you through all eternity! There is no escaping God's wrath.

The congregation of Israel needed a mediator, without Aaron they would have perished. And so it is with you sinner. Nothing else will suffice. Why did Aaron run and not Moses? Because Aaron was the only one qualified. He was the High Priest; the one ordained by God, no one else had the right to perform but Aaron. In the same way Christ is the only one qualified to deal with sin. Since He alone has given a perfect satisfaction to that law, something you and I could never give. There was no other mediator, neither was there a plurality of mediators.

### 3) **An Effective High Priest** (v50). *"The plague was stayed."*

Moses commanded Aaron to run with a censer filled with fire. Where did the fire come from? From off the altar, where the fire of God had already fallen and consumed the sacrifice. There was no time for a sacrifice, to atone for the people's sin. But the fire from of the altar, which declared God's satisfaction, was carried by Aaron the High Priest and presented before God's face. Observe that it was that which Aaron carried in the censer which prevented the plague from destroying the rest of the nation. It was upon the basis of his work as High Priest that God's wrath was diverted. The sacrifice spoke on their behalf, Heb Ch 12:24 Jesus the mediator, *"The blood of sprinkling that speaketh..."* Because God is satisfied the plague is stayed.

In the same way that there is a basis for God's wrath issuing forth, THERE MUST BE A BASIS FOR GOD TO FORGIVE. God never forgives a man or woman's sin on some empty, frivolous basis. That foundation, upon which God goes on to forgive sins, is that of His justice being fully satisfied. It was upon that basis that the plague was stayed. Divine pardon is something altogether different from Human pardon. Human pardon is always upon the basis of love, a parent forgives his child because he loves that child. God never forgives sinners out of love. God forgives on the basis of His justice being satisfied [love and justice are mixed]. Where was the justice of God satisfied? In Christ! Christ's atonement was perfectly effective in satisfying God's wrath against sin.

Out of God's justice flows His mercy. While God displayed His justice in sending forth the plague, at the same time He had made provision by way of the sacrifice, that is pure mercy! The wrath came forth upon the basis of the law being broken. The mercy came forth upon the basis of the law being satisfied.

Those who were saved were no less deserving of being spared than those whom the plague had already taken. They were as good as dead, but for the sacrifice. Many have trouble with God's Sovereign decree of election. The marvellous thing here is that they all weren't consumed. Along with God's wrath is His mercy, love compelled Aaron to run. That's sovereign grace see Rom Ch9:13. Notice that there was no redemption for those whom the plague had already slain. That teaches us that when death overtakes man, there is no further opportunity for that individual to be shown mercy! There is the thought of limitation. Pardon and forgiveness are limited to this lifetime. Furthermore forgiveness of sin only takes place on earth (MattCh9:6) Christ says, *'he has power on earth to forgive sins.'* When a man crosses the boundary of death, redemption is impossible, (Job Ch36:18), *'because there is wrath, beware...then a great ransom...'* will be unable to redeem you. May you see the sufficiency of Christ, and flee to him at once, for fear that God's wrath should overtake you. Don't presume on God, time or mercy, see Luke Ch12. The fire has already fallen on Christ, he is the mediator, and through him you can know salvation. If Christ is not your Mediator and Priest in this life, He most certainly will not be your priest in the life to come. You will have to face the unrelenting wrath of God alone.

By. Paul Thompson.

*"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them."*

Hebrews 10:16